

STATE OF MINNESOTA  
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS  
FOR THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Route Permit  
Application for the Parkers Prairie  
115kV Transmission Line Project in  
Otter Tail County

**SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY  
AT PUBLIC HEARING AND  
SUMMARY OF WRITTEN COMMENTS  
(REVISED)**

A Public Hearing was conducted in this matter at the Prairie Event Center in Parkers Prairie, Minnesota, on April 10, 2012. Testimony was heard from the Applicant, Great River Energy Company, and several members of the public. The record closed on April 30, 2012.

Rick Heuring, Senior Field Representative, Lands Rights Department, appeared for Great River Energy, along with Steve Lawler, Project Manager and Marsha Parlow, Environmental Services Representative.

Ray Kirsch, Planner Principal, and Planning Director David Birkholz appeared for the Minnesota Department of Commerce.

**SUMMARY OF ORAL TESTIMONY**

1. On October 24, 2011, Great River Energy (Company, Great River) filed an application with the Public Utilities Commission (Commission, PUC) under the Alternative Permitting Process.<sup>1</sup> The Application seeks a route permit along 2.1 miles on the south side of county and state aid highway (CSAH) 6, in Otter Tail County. The proposed project is in Parkers Prairie Township, north and west of the Parkers Prairie City Limits.<sup>2</sup>

2. Great River, along with Lake Region Electric Cooperative (Lake Region), seeks to construct a 115 volt transmission line and modifications to an existing distribution substation owned and operated by Lake Region.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Minn. Rules Ch. 7850.2800-3700.

<sup>2</sup> Exhibit 2; Testimony of Rick Heuring.

<sup>3</sup> Testimony of Heuring.

3. Great River maintains the need for the project is to replace a radial line currently serving the distribution substation. The line now carries only 41.6kV. The line comes from a link to Otter Tail Power's system located in the city of Parkers Prairie, and is exposed to storm damage and problems with ice. In its present configuration, the line is 3.0 miles long. Great River maintains it is necessary to increase the voltage of the line in order to improve its reliability.<sup>4</sup>

4. Great River has observed an increased demand for electricity in the area served by the proposed 115kV (upgraded) transmission line. There has been an increase in agricultural requirements and recreational load, which has pushed the current 41.6kV system to its maximum capacity. In the event of any failures in the electrical system in the area, the distribution system operated by Lake Region is susceptible to failure due to burned-out equipment caused by low voltage issues. The Company has applied to increase the capacity of the current substation to 115kV to help insure adequate capacity and increased reliability.<sup>5</sup>

5. The proposed project would be disconnected from the Otter Tail Power System and would connect to an existing 115kV system owned and operated by Great River that runs west of Cora Lake on the north side of Parkers Prairie. The length of the line would be decreased to 2.1 miles from its current 3.0 miles. The proposed point of connection is near the railroad running on the west side of Cora Lake.<sup>6</sup>

6. Great River's 41.6kV line currently runs along the south side of CSAH 6. Because of that, the Company wants to build the 115 kV line on the same side of the road. The north side of the road is occupied by a distribution line owned by Lake Region Cooperative.<sup>7</sup>

7. The proposed power line would be built on single wood pole structures approximately 70 feet high and extend along the south side of County Road 6. The alignment proposed in the Application is 55 feet south of the centerline of the road. The proposed alignment assumes the road right-of-way will not expand beyond the present 50 feet from the centerline.<sup>8</sup>

8. Notice of the Public Hearing was published in the local newspapers of record, the *Parkers Prairie Independent*, and the *Fergus Falls Daily Journal*.<sup>9</sup>

9. Richard (Rick) West, Otter Tail County Highway Engineer, noted that the County eventually will have to repair CSAH 6 in the area of the proposed line. In order to rebuild the road back to modern specifications, the County will require a right-of-way extending 60 feet (it currently is 50 feet) from the center of CSAH 6. His Department's plans look into the future approximately 20 years, and do not include the reconstruction

---

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Testimony of Heuring.

<sup>8</sup> Exhibit 2.

<sup>9</sup> Exhibit 18.

of CSAH 6. However, West notes that if the traffic in the area increases significantly, the road expansion could occur within sooner than 20 years.<sup>10</sup>

10. The current Otter Tail County Plan runs through 2016. Mr. West believes resurfacing of county roads will be necessary every 15 to 18 years.<sup>11</sup>

11. Great River emphasizes that its decision to apply for a line on the south side of the road would create less disruption to homes and farmsteads.<sup>12</sup> Only one farm home (Bruce Jahnke's) lies on the south side of the road, whereas three farmers have their farmsteads on the north side.

12. Mr. Jahnke expressed concern that the proposed line could encroach 15 feet further into his property than the current 41.6kV line does already. This intrusion would disrupt his irrigation system and encroach deeper into the line of trees that forms his windbreak. Jahnke believes that putting the line 15 feet farther south would eliminate his windbreak. The 15-foot south move results from Great River's desire to construct the 115kV poles five feet south of the current 41.6kV poles, and the County's possible 10-foot right-of-way extension.<sup>13</sup>

13. The 41.6kV transmission line proposed to be replaced currently lies within the County's road right-of-way, which extends 50 feet from the centerline of the road. Great River is concerned that it does not build the new line inside the County Highway's right-of-way, which could expand to 60 feet from the centerline. If the 115kV poles are not outside of the highway right-of-way and ever have to be moved to accommodate new highway construction, the move may be at the Company's expense. Mr. Heuring noted that such a situation has occurred in a different part of Otter Tail County, costing the Company \$800,000.00.<sup>14</sup> In a letter filed with the Administrative Law Judge during the comment period, Mr. West expressed the same concern.<sup>15</sup>

14. Terry Carlson lives north of CSAH 6, but farms property on both sides of the road. His primary concern is for the disruption of his irrigation systems, and also that a widening of the right-of-way could interfere with two of his wells.<sup>16</sup> Mr. Heuring acknowledged the severe disruption to one of Mr. Carlson's wells if the line is routed north of CSAH 6.<sup>17</sup>

15. Frederick Liljegren, who also lives north of CSAH 6, is concerned about the same disruptions to his trees as expressed by Mr. Jahnke if the Commission decides to route the new line north of CSAH 6.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Testimony of Rick West.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Testimony of Heuring.

<sup>13</sup> Testimony of Bruce Jahnke.

<sup>14</sup> Testimony of Heuring.

<sup>15</sup> Written Comment of Rick West.

<sup>16</sup> Testimony of Terry Carlson.

<sup>17</sup> Testimony of Heuring.

<sup>18</sup> Testimony of Frederick Liljegren.

16. Rodney Peterson, who also farms land north of the highway, is worried that Great River's right-of-way might expand to interfere with his irrigation equipment. That result could cause him to make a major overhaul of his equipment to shorten the irrigation radius. Mr. Peterson noted also that shortening of the irrigation radius lessens the amount of farmland that could be irrigated, because the irrigator could no longer rotate in a complete circle without infringing on utility or highway rights-of-way.<sup>19</sup>

17. Mr. Carlson and Mr. Jahnke both noted that the County's possible plan to widen the right-of-way for CSAH 6 was not mentioned in the permit application or at the scoping meeting conducted December 13, 2011.<sup>20</sup>

### WRITTEN COMMENTS

1. Otter Tail County Highway Engineer Rick West filed a written comment to reiterate his testimony at the Public Hearing, to the effect that the County desires consideration for the proposed transmission line to be located at a distance greater than 60 feet from the center line of CSAH 6. The goal is to assure that future re-construction of the road does not conflict with the proposed transmission line.

2. A comment from Stacy Kotch, Utility Transmission Coordinator at the Minnesota Department of Transportation, notes that the proposed line would cross Minnesota Trunk Highway 29 at or near its eastern end. Kotch notes that highway crossings by utilities generally do not pose insurmountable difficulties in issuing permits, and that MnDOT routinely grants such permits to a variety of utilities.

3. Plants Beautiful Nursery/Dittenberner Tree Farm (Plants Beautiful) owns two parcels of land affected by the alignment of the new 115kV line. The parcels are separated by State Highway 29.

4. Plants Beautiful requests a shift in the alignment of the 115kV line on the east side of Highway 29, to go along its north property line. That shift would allow use of land owned by Plants Beautiful without having the power line in the way.

5. Regarding Plants Beautiful's land lying west of Highway 29 along CSAH 6, compensation is requested. Plants Beautiful requests compensation for the loss of 100 trees that would be removed to allow for the 115kV line. It also seeks compensation for loss of the land on which it currently grows those trees.

Dated: May 29, 2012

/s/ Richard C. Luis

RICHARD C. LUIS

Administrative Law Judge

Reported: Janet Shaddix Elling  
Shaddix & Associates

<sup>19</sup> Testimony of Rodney Peterson.

<sup>20</sup> Testimonies of Carlson and Jahnke.